



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk 860-441-6640  
Town Manager  
860-441-6630

**Mayor James L. Streeter, Councilors Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Catherine Kolnaski, Deborah B. Monteiro, Frank O'Beirne, Jr., Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Paulann H. Sheets, and Harry A. Watson**

**Monday, March 29, 2010**

**7:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **FYE 2011 BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

#### **I. ROLL CALL**

*The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. by Mayor Streeter.*

Members Present: Mayor Streeter, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Kolnaski, Councilor Monteiro, Councilor Peruzzotti and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor O'Beirne, Jr. and Councilor Sheets

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Superintendent of Schools Paul Kadri, Board of Education Chairman Bob Peruzzotti, Board of Education members Kirsten Hoyt, Rita Volkmann, Pat Doyle, and Brian Shirvell, RTM members, Town staff, Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher and Office Assistant Lori Watrous.*

#### **II. SALUTE TO THE FLAG**

*The Salute to the Flag was led by Board of Education member Kirsten Hoyt.*

#### **III. INTRODUCTION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS**

*Elected officials introduced themselves at the request of Mayor Streeter.*

#### **IV. READING OF PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE**

*The Notice of Public Hearing pursuant to a resolution passed by the Town Council was read by Town Clerk Betsy Moukawsher.*

#### **V. BUDGET PRESENTATIONS**

##### **a. Town Manager**

*Town Manager Mark Oefinger presented a summary of the proposed Town Budget for fiscal year 2011, outlining expenditures and revenues. He explained that "salary adjustments" in the budget are reductions that will be realized by the elimination of up to 10-1/2 departmental positions. The Town Manager then stated that the Town is past only cutting departments. The next couple of years will be similar to the current one, and Groton needs to determine which programs and services to discontinue.*

##### **b. Superintendent of Schools**

*Superintendent Paul Kadri summarized the proposed Board of Education budget for 2011 through a slide show entitled, "Gaining Strength with Collaborative Strategic & Comprehensive Decision Making". Mr. Kadri stated that he believes in eliminating positions thru attrition, and outlined the need for the Phase II School Project.*

#### **VI. OPENING OF PUBLIC HEARING**

*Mayor Streeter called the FYE 2011 Budget Public Hearing to order at 8:24 p.m. The Mayor stated that due to the number of citizens speaking, each speaker would be limited to three minutes. He requested the audience be respectful of one another, even when opinions differ.*

*Sally Whitney, 52 Division Street, a Town employee, noted that in the Town Manager's Proposed Budget the building monitor for the Senior Center would be eliminated, impacting evening use of the building. Ms. Whitney wonders where the money would come from for a monitor for RTM*

meetings, and believes that the RTM should be fiscally responsible and meet at the Town Hall Annex to avoid the additional cost. Additionally, in Ms. Whitney's opinion, all Town employees should be asked to take furlough days to eliminate the necessity for layoffs. If four furlough days were implemented, it would save 1/4 of a million dollars. She stated that if positions are eliminated, bumping within the union would occur due to seniority, resulting in a need for additional training of personnel as well as voids where positions were eliminated.

Ralph Whitney, 52 Division Street, referenced a fact sheet from the Mystic & Noank Library. This library is funded by both Groton and Stonington, and statistically Groton is paying almost 2-1/2 times more per cardholder than Stonington. He suggested that the funding for the Mystic & Noank Library be reduced to be proportional with contributions from Stonington. Mr. Whitney believes that the time for discussion is over and the Council should take action.

John Peters, 233 Judson Avenue, stated that he has had flooding for the past 17 years, and is concerned that the problem is spreading. He asked the Council to appropriate funding to correct the drainage in the Fishtown watershed area.

Nora Patterson, 363 Ridgewood Drive, stated that she supports the education budget, but questions inadequate teacher training in use of Promethean boards, installation of metal doors in the central office, and cutting a library aide in a school of 1,400 students. She remarked that computers are a great educational tool, but children can no longer do research using books, write without spellcheck, or take math tests without a calculator.

Ed Ettinger, 174 Cedar Road, Mystic, implored the Town Council and RTM not to accept a 12% tax increase. He questions eliminating library hours on Sunday when students are preparing for the school week, wonders where the cost savings from the Phase I school project are, and is concerned by a \$1 million project to re-sod the Fitch Senior High School football field. Mr. Ettinger believes that non-teaching support staff should be decreased, social services should be provided by the myriad of non-profit agencies in the region, and freezes be placed on capital expenditures and hiring.

Julie Maisch, 60 Colony Road, requested \$3,000 for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra. Many Groton residents are part of the orchestra, the chorus, the friends group, and the audience at these concerts. As part of a "Music in the Schools" program, a quartet from the symphony goes to every elementary and middle school.

Donna Morrisette, 166 Cedar Road, would like to see a 0% increase in the Town budget. She stated that the Town cannot afford to drive more people away due to increased taxes, and she urged Councilors to consider a tax freeze for citizens over 65 years old.

Kevin Trejo, 536-L Shennecossett Road, noted that Groton teachers have agreed to a 0% salary increase both this year and next. He believes that the budget does need to be trimmed, but suggests that programs be reduced before being eliminated entirely. Mr. Trejo stated that the Thames Street project does need to be addressed, but he would like to see this item as a referendum after educating the public as to the importance of the project.

John Maisch, 60 Colony Road, requested continued support for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra.

Larry Nelson, 50 Midway Oval, a member of the Neighborhood Revitalization Zone Committee and the Poquonnock Bridge Neighborhood Association, would like to see funding maintained for community policing in the Fort Hill Homes area. This area used to be burdened by derelict homes, crime, and drug trafficking, but through the joint efforts of the Neighborhood Associations and community policing, the neighborhood has come a long way and Mr. Nelson doesn't want it to

*go backwards.*

*Jack Sebastian, 4 East Shore Avenue, would like to see no increase in property taxes. He believes that raising property taxes when sources of revenue diminish is not a solution. Mr. Sebastian remarked that Electric Boat and Pfizer will not be here forever, and reminded elected officials that their campaigns were based on proven fiscal leadership.*

*Dave Williams, 129 Elm Street, agreed that taxes are too high. He has observed police officers controlling the traffic coming and going from Fitch Senior High School in the morning and afternoon. Mr. Williams does not think that students should be driving their own vehicles when there are buses and late buses available, but if students do have a need to drive their own vehicles they should have to pay for parking permits. Furthermore, he does not believe that the Town needs more school construction.*

*Roger Arguelles, 177 Cedar Road, is concerned that the student population in Groton has decreased but the Board of Education budget has increased. He believes that the City highway budget is unacceptable and should be rejected. Mr. Arguelles does not want property taxes increased and suggested that the Town Charter be changed to include a budget referendum.*

*Pat Sparkman, 52 Sound Breeze Avenue, stated that citizens are concerned about taxes, and she wonders what regionalization efforts are being made in addition to the Probate Court. Ms. Sparkman noted that school buses have empty seats and students should be utilizing buses instead of driving their private vehicles to school.*

*Randy Burke, 1020 Gold Star Highway, is on a fixed income and is against an increase in property taxes, noting that Ledge Light Health District is also adding a tax to every septic tank. Mr. Burke has been told that the Route 184 area is not populated enough to have Town sewer. He is also concerned that abutting property owners were not given notice when the unsightly new church was built, as this has decreased his property value.*

*John Sutherland, 32 Neptune Drive, reminded Councilors that the Thames Street Revitalization Project referendum failed and asked that the \$2.9 million requested by the City be removed from the budget. Mr. Sutherland noted that throughout the country cuts are being made to meet budget targets, and he believes that Groton's overall expenditures have not been cut enough.*

*Doug Schwartz, 420 Long Hill Road, stated that he is unhappy with the room designated for this meeting and the order of the agenda. Mr. Schwartz cited the ratio of students to teachers/staff members at 10-to-1, and stated that as class size decreases, so does performance. He believes that the Board of Education budget is not a "bare-bones" budget, and restructuring needs to take place. Mr. Schwartz would like salaries and over-time expenditures for public employees to be posted on the Town website.*

*Marie Tyler Wiley, 18 Hillside Avenue, Noank, stated that in this economy everyone has taken a hit. She noted that there is dead weight in the school system, and property taxes are based on real estate assessments that are now out-of-date as property values have decreased.*

*Fred Conti, 23 Smith Court, Noank, stated that strategies should be developed to compensate for lost revenues. He remarked that many Groton workers are unemployed, have furlough days, reduced hours, and shift reductions. A budget needs to be developed that taxpayers can afford.*

*Andre Noel, 12 North Street, GLP, wonders how the figure for the Thames Street project was arrived at; he thinks that the repaving, with sidewalks and granite curbing, could be done for much less.*

*Richard Cady, 36 Island View Avenue, Mystic, remarked that all citizens are facing budgetary constraints and are funding only those things that are necessary. He stated that the municipal and education budgets are top-heavy, and it is time that the two Grotons combine and trim services that the taxpayers can no longer afford. He is in favor of a strong mayor and a referendum on the budget.*

*Bruce McDermott, 328 Noank Road, thinks that taxpayers should not be asked to do more than they are already doing. He is concerned by public safety overtime costs, and noted that a security force and a police officer are present at Fitch Senior High School all the time. Mr. McDermott wonders if this presence is necessary.*

*Zell Steever, 81 Main Street, Noank, is opposed to a budget increase. He is working with the Town to make it more energy efficient through a grant that was recently received. He hopes that the Town will do everything possible to reduce energy costs.*

*Genevieve Cerf, 17 Crescent Street, requested a level budget. She believes that the Town could cut CIP, Fleet Reserve, and the Computer Replacement Fund until the economy rebounds. She also suggested reducing night-lighting on public grounds and taking action regarding old school buildings. Ms. Cerf stated that the City of Groton's requested funding for Thames Street should not even be considered, but should go to referendum. She believes that the Town should have a budget referendum, and urged the Council to appoint a Regionalization Committee to research all possibilities for saving money through regionalization of functions such as GIS, payroll, IT, and school administration.*

*Michael Talbot, 10 Florence Drive, Mystic, chairman of the Groton Youth Advisory Council, understands the reality of budgets but requests that the Council reconsider the elimination of a part-time youth councilor, as families in crisis need support.*

*Stephen Alfield, 47 Somerset Drive, Mystic, lives in the Fishtown watershed area and noted that both he and his neighbors have had sump-pumps since 1982. He is against an increase in the budget, but would like the water problem in his neighborhood corrected.*

*Barry Adcock, 33 North Road, stated that a 12-1/2% increase in the budget is "crazy". He noted that Depot Road has a new park to replace one that was 50 yards down the road, and Promethean boards don't do any good because teachers don't know how to use them. Mr. Adcock does not consider instances such as these to be good money management.*

*Lynne Marshall, 118 Pearl Street, Noank, would like regionalization of health insurance for Town employees. She is concerned that while school enrollment is declining, costs are going up, and she believes that steps should be taken to eliminate unfunded mandates imposed by the State. Ms. Marshall is opposed to the back-door approach of putting the Thames Street project in the budget and stated that it should not even be considered.*

*Marian Galbraith, 771 Shennecossett Road, stated that Thames Street is suffering from erosion and deterioration that will not wait until better economic times, and the request in the budget is for retaining walls to make Thames Street safe.*

*Jim Bates, 11 Conrad Street, Mystic, a board member of the Mystic Chamber of Commerce and chairman of the Groton Business Association, remarked that the budget will be constrained over the next few years and their organization is willing to collaborate with the Town to help support and develop local businesses to ease some of the revenue shortfalls that will be coming down the line.*

*John Schloss, 80 Main Street, supports what has already been said.*

*Victor Burdick, 15 Davis Court, Noank, has owned his home since 1957 and urged the Council not to raise property taxes.*

*Christie Williams, 5 Allyn's Alley, Mystic, Director of the Arts Cafe in Mystic, stated that the Arts Cafe is a program of the Parks and Recreation Department which features acclaimed writers and poets, and requested that the level of support for the Arts Cafe remain the same as last year.*

*Melanie Greenhouse, 23 Brook Street, Noank, requested support for the Arts Cafe where fine poets and writers are highlighted, and which includes a high school writers program once a year.*

*Maria Terese Walker, 30 High Street, Noank, is a real estate broker who stated that houses in Mystic and Stonington do not have the same property taxes as similar homes in Groton. Groton taxes seem to be higher. She asked that there be no increase in property taxes and that the Town find other ways of reducing its budget.*

*Elaine Cole, 17 Burrows Street, Mystic, would like to keep taxes and the budget level. Neighbors are losing jobs, homes are being foreclosed and people are cutting back. Groton cannot afford more in taxes. She suggested collecting trash once a week versus twice; this could be negotiated during the next contract negotiation with trash vendors.*

*Celeste Duffy, 216 Tyler Avenue, is against a 12% tax increase. She noted that the Thames Street Revitalization Project is not a beautification project but a repair and construction project to save the road.*

*William Jervis, 75 Shennecossett Parkway, stated that Thames Street is a liability and now is a good time to do the project. Mr. Jervis is also in favor of community policing in the Poquonnock Bridge area.*

*Russell Poe, 112 Atlantic Avenue, is against any increase in property taxes, as citizens are living with less due to furloughs and reductions in investments.*

*Robert Maloney, 11 East Shore Avenue, sells insurance and is concerned about the percentage of health insurance premiums paid by Town employees. He added that most of his clients pay 60% of their insurance premiums.*

*Patrick Norton, 2 Lamphere Road, is concerned that if the Town budget is going up so much this year, what will happen next year? He would like a level budget this year.*

*George Finch, 100 Allen Street, stated that the tax rate is too high. He is concerned that high school graduates don't know multiplication, fractions, and decimals. Mr. Finch is concerned that the youth of today cannot even perform basic math such as counting change.*

*Phil Butta, 282 Noank Ledyard Road, Mystic, chairman of the Parks and Recreation Commission, stated that the Parks and Recreation Department generates revenue and there are few opportunities for reduction. If additional cuts are made to remove staff and programs, revenues will be decreased as well.*

*Tim Plungis, 90 Lamphere Road, Mystic, a candidate for State Representative, urged the Council to set an example for the State and in dealing with these tough economic times.*

*Bob Westhaver, 809 Shennecossett Road, thinks that citizens need to be educated about the Thames Street Revitalization Project. If the road collapses, law suits will be inevitable. Mr. Westhaver feels that Groton is in need of a long-term plan.*

*Oliver Porter, 44 Main Street, believes that something is wrong when taxes continue to go up. Mr. Porter remarked that as a retired educator he is concerned about unfunded mandates. High School students are able to get college credits and he wonders whether the public school system should be paying for this.*

*Bruce Avery, 55 Spicer Avenue, Noank, stated that citizens can't afford this budget. He remarked that services need to be cut back and the Public Works Department eliminated. It is the wrong time to talk about a Phase II School Project.*

## **VII. ADJOURNMENT**

*Mayor James Streeter declared the public hearing closed at 10:10 p.m.*

*Attest:*

*Betsy Moukawsher, Town Clerk  
Clerk of the Council*

*Lori Watrous, Office Assistant*